

Trends of Europeanization in social welfare politics

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Trends of Europeanization in social welfare politics

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July 2002

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Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share “work in progress” before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department's teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

Abstract

Fritz W. Scharpf (2000 and 2002) defines the term Europeanization as the progressive shift of governmental tasks to the European level. According to this understanding he identifies four modes of Europeanization. Further, he recognizes the establishment of minimum standards and the open method of co-ordination as specific modes of Europeanization. This paper first relates the welfare political goals and problems of both named methods of Europeanization in social welfare politics, then describes the political processes which accompany them, and subsequently tests whether Scharpf's analysis can be affirmed.

Zusammenfassung

Fritz W. Scharpf (2000 and 2002) definiert den Begriff Europäisierung als die fortschreitende Verlagerung von Regierungsaufgaben auf die europäische Ebene. In Anlehnung an diese Definition identifiziert er vier Typen der Europäisierung. Außerdem ordnet er die Einführung von Mindeststandards und die Methode der offenen Koordination seinen Europäisierungstypen zu. Dieser Text legt zuerst die wohlfahrtspolitischen Ziele und Probleme der beiden Methoden der Europäisierung von Wohlfahrtspolitik dar, liefert dann eine Beschreibung der dazugehörigen Politikprozesse und prüft daraufhin, ob Scharpfs Analyse bestätigt werden kann.

Keywords

Europeanization, European social welfare politics, European multi-level governance

Schlagwörter

Europäisierung, europäische Wohlfahrtspolitik, Regieren im europäischen Mehrebenensystem

Comment

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1. Introduction

After the completion of the economic and monetary union, there is no doubt that the European Union (EU) needs a social dimension if the Member States want to maintain their levels of social welfare policy services (Mosley 1990; Keithley 1991; Room 1991; Leibfried and Pierson 1992; Peterson 1993; Leibfried and Pierson 2000). However, it is also a fact that Member States do not want to relinquish their national sovereignty and political decision capacities in the areas of social and employment policy, which I refer to as social welfare politics (Bercussen 1994; Arl 1997; Calliess 1999). Not only the question of *how* European social welfare politics should be structured (Goetschy 1991; Dispersyn et al. 1998; Busch 1998; Esping-Anderson et al. 2001), but also *who* should have decision-making capabilities within the European multi-level system of governance (Vandamme 1985; Bieback 1991; Teague 1993; Watson 1993; Streeck 1998; de la Porte and Pochet 2002a), stand at the centre of the social welfare politics debate within the process of European integration. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse trends of Europeanization¹ in social welfare politics from the governance perspective, especially, if one understands Europeanization as the progressive shift of governmental tasks to the European level, like Fritz Scharpf does (Scharpf 2000: 8). Adopting his understanding of Europeanization, I will elaborate which trends of Europeanization in social welfare politics are distinguishable in the process of European integration up to now.

Before I present the fundamental methods of Europeanization in social welfare politics, which are the establishment of minimum standards and open co-ordination, and analyse these methods in relation to their effects on Europeanization, it is important to relate the modes of Europeanization as developed by Scharpf (2000). They are the points of reference for the analyse follows. It is important to clarify which trends of Europeanization, or forms of governing in the European multi-level system, were successful in the area of social welfare politics. Finally, further research needs arising from the results of the analyses will be discussed.

¹ The term Europeanization is used divergently in the literature. Olsen (2001) provides a helpful summary and criticism of the diverse theoretical approaches and concepts for which the term Europeanization is central.

2. Modes of Europeanization

As Scharpf (2000 and 2002) emphasizes, European Studies is currently in a theoretical stalemate. He attests to the insufficient reach and explanatory power of all integration theories because they attempt to understand the EU either as a type of international organisation or from the perspective of nation-states (Scharpf 2000: 5-7). According to Scharpf (2000), the same applies to “a variety of innovative concepts and metaphors characterizing the European polity as a ‘condominio,’ a ‘consortio,’ a ‘fusion’ of governing functions, a structure of ‘network-governance’ and the like” (ibid.: 7). In order to understand the political system of the EU, and to be able to theoretically grasp governing within the European multi-level system, Scharpf suggests, “that we should work with a plurality of lower-level and simpler concepts describing distinct governing modes in the European polity” (ibid.: 8).

Scharpf introduces four modes in order to analyse the vertical governing in the European multi-level system² and the progressive Europeanization of governing functions (ibid.: 8), which he standardizes by reference to the criteria of institutional problem-solving and legitimacy (ibid.: 9). He differentiates between the modes of mutual adjustment, intergovernmental negotiations, hierarchical direction, and joint decisions (ibid.: 8). According to this differentiation, he classifies the modes of Europeanization by the same name, which I relate in terms of the criteria of institutional problem-solving capacities.

Scharpf understands the quasi-interactions of *mutual adjustment* as a “minimum reaction” by nation state governments to the issues resulting from economic integration. The nation states react directly to each other without reference to the European decision-making level. They observe and anticipate other governmental reactions to economic integration. Policy-learning takes place as a non-co-operative game (ibid.: 11–13).

The mode of *intergovernmental negotiations* refers mainly to agreements within the second and third “pillar” of the European Union as well as to the policy areas of the first “pillar” which still require unanimous decisions in the Council of Ministers. National policies are co-ordinated and standardized through negotiations between national governments. Nation states do not take on new obligations since the conversion of agreements into national law remains under the control of Member States (ibid.: 13–14).

The mode of *hierarchical direction* refers to competencies which have shifted power completely to the European level where it is exercised by supranational actors without the participation of governments of the Member States. As examples, the European Central

² Scharpf (2002) considers the European level and Member State levels in his approach. He does not differentiate between levels in Member States (ibid.: 8).

Bank, the European Court of Justice and the European Commission can be named. The mode of hierarchical direction currently enables the expansion of market competition and ensures a stable currency (ibid.: 14–18).

The *joint decisions* mode combines aspects of intergovernmental negotiations with strong participation of supranational actors. Scharpf refers particularly to market-making and market-correcting competencies, which are to be found in the first “pillar” of the EU. This mode of Europeanization presupposes a broad consensus. Here European legislation in general is dependent on the initiatives of the Commission which must be decided, either unanimously or by qualified majority voting, in the Council of Ministers, and, increasingly, in the European Parliament (ibid.: 18–22).

Scharpf (2000) applies his modes of Europeanization to social welfare politics and concludes that the European minimum standards in the area of welfare politics correspond to the mode of joint decisions (ibid.: 22 and Scharpf 2002: 84), whereas the method of open co-ordination cannot clearly be located. In the English version of his paper, published in 2000, he positions open co-ordination “somewhere between the mode of ‘intergovernmental negotiations’ and the mode of ‘mutual adjustment’” (Scharpf 2000: 24), but the German revised version of his paper, published in March 2002, refers to open co-ordination as “somewhere between the mode of ‘joint decisions’ and the mode of ‘mutual adjustment’” (Scharpf 2002: 86; translated by UB). The missing correspondence between both texts justifies the following discussion whether Scharpf’s analyses can be stand up to a closer view of the political processes in the area of minimum standards and, especially, clarify if open co-ordination is shaped by which modes. In order to conduct this test transparently, I will discuss both selected methods of Europeanization of welfare policing according to the following pattern: I will first relate the welfare political goals and problems of both methods, then describe the political processes which accompany them, and subsequently test whether Scharpf’s analyses can be affirmed.

3. Europeanization in social welfare politics

3.1 Minimum standards

3.1.1 Goals and problems

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, the EU made changes in the strategies for developments in the social welfare area. While the European level sought to harmonize social standards at a high grade, standards began to be set increasingly at a minimum during the 1990s (Goetschy 1994:478). Minimum standards do not aim towards a comprehensive social security system at the European level. Up to now, the instrument of minimum standards is applied to the area of, for example, parental leave and part-time work (Falkner 1998:97ff.). It must be emphasized that, up to now, minimum standards for welfare policies have been introduced at only a low grade and could only be accomplished in the EU by referring to the gender equality principle. Nevertheless, the term welfare political harmonization can be used to characterize the goals that are pursued by the determination of minimum standards for social services at the European level (Behning and Feigl-Heihs 2001: 16f.).

The introduction of minimum standards appears problematic for the following reasons: since varying standards exist in the various Member States, the countries with lower standards are in danger of compromising their ability to make economic achievements in the case that the European level determines minimum requirements that are too high. If, on the other hand, European standards are set too low, the wealthier Member States may be encouraged to reduce their standards to meet a lower European minimum requirement. In the wealthier countries, a dismantling of social requirements is feared, although a higher level than the legally required minimum standards are allowed (Demmer 1994:114; Busch 1998:275; Behning and Feigl-Heihs 2001:16). However, in political reality this has not yet happened. The advantage of this procedure is that consensus of the different actors' interests can be reached through the European decision-making processes. How these have been shaped will be closer examined now.

3.1.2 Political processes

First, it must be emphasized that the introduction of minimum standards is limited to welfare political areas in which the EU has jurisdiction. Accordingly, the suggestion to introduce minimum standards originates in the European Commission. Furthermore, all political processes, which have led to the introduction of minimum standards achieved by the instrument of social dialogue, giving preference to negotiations between European employee and employer associations (Falkner 1998). After the European social partners agreed on the form of minimum standards, the Commission, Parliament, and Council of Ministers up to now

affirmed the shaped policy formulations by European social partners in almost all parts. Accordingly, European minimum standards have been shaped on the supranational level. In addition, the European Court of Justice is charged with overseeing the implementation of minimum standards at the nation state levels. The Court can request individual Member States to implement the minimum standards.

Most importantly, in the realm of introducing minimum standards, primarily supranational actors, particularly the Commission and European social partners, shaped the governance process. The implementation, however, is done by the Member States and overseen by the European Court.

3.1.3 Testing Scharpf's analysis

Scharpf's analysis of Europeanization in the area of welfare political minimum standards can be confirmed by observing the course of the outlined political processes as a whole from definition to evaluation. The mode of joint decisions is present. However, if the political process is differentiated into a decision-making phase and an implementation phase, and if the actual influence of the actors upon the course of proceedings is considered, Scharpf's analysis must be modified.

Mainly supranational actors, the commission and social partners organized at European level, dominated the political processes that led to the introduction of minimum standards. Intergovernmental negotiations, however, were merely in the background. In my opinion, the political process concluding with the legislation of minimum standards most closely reflects Scharpf's Europeanization mode of hierarchical direction, although this mode does not respect the openness of the process to social partners. The reason here fore may be Scharpf's point of departure while developing his modes of Europeanization. He refers to the narrowed concept of governing functions against to the wider concept of governance, used in this text that opens up to the inclusion of non-governmental actors.

Member states as well as the European Court of Justice dominated the implementation and evaluation phase of the political processes in the area of welfare political minimum standards. In my opinion, this mode of Europeanization is not present in Scharpf's typology.

3.2 Open co-ordination

3.2.1 Goals and problems

European social welfare politics are currently shaped by the method of open co-ordination. It is difficult to achieve consensus in order to establish binding rules on the European level in

the area of welfare policy because of differing interests and preferences among Member States. In addition, the introduction of minimum standards at a low grade can only lead to harmonization of nation state policies in the long-term, and also presupposes jurisdiction of the EU. The method of open co-ordination seems to show a way out of the problematic situation in European social integration, and, thus, respects the differing organization of welfare states in the EU. It has been applied in the area of employment policy since 1997, and has been expanded to the policy area of social inclusion since December 2000. Currently, open co-ordination is being introduced in the areas of old-age pension and education policy.

This method is based on the idea of a convergent development of national welfare politics, grounded in the expectation that the Member States will take similar measures to solve their welfare political problems without losing their differing welfare state identities in respect to organization, structure, autonomy, etc. The function of the European level is limited to co-ordinating and preparing possible solutions in defined topic areas over which it has no further authority. The nation states maintain complete decision-making power. The national levels voluntarily consider recommendations of the European Council that can lead to the adoption of recommended measures into national law (Streeck 1998: 410). The effects of this “soft law” method on the welfare politics of nation states are not yet known. In the long term, the European level hopes, next to a convergent development of nation state welfare policies, for an improvement of social standards in the Member States (Behning and Feigl-Heihs 2001:19). Since this improvement depends on the good will of each Member State, the functioning of this relatively new practice remains to be evaluated (for first evaluations see de la Porte and Pochet 2002a).

3.2.2 Political processes

The procedure of open co-ordination begins in the Commission, which develops guidelines for the shaping of National Action Plans (NAPs) to be confirmed by the Council. Thereupon, the relevant national ministries are asked to report on the situation particular to their own countries, as well as elaborate on their plans to improve the situation within their policy area. The NAPs are then sent to the Commission where they are utilized for the procedures of monitoring and benchmarking.

By monitoring, the European Commission currently understands mainly oversight of data on developments of living and working conditions, the attitude of the population in Member States, etc. Here Eurostat, the data collecting central office of the EU, plays a main role. Most recently, the identification of indicators is valued in the context of open co-ordination. These indicators should provide background information about the development of the respective policy areas (most recently see Atkinson et al. 2002).

Benchmarking means identifying Member States or regions which are “the best” in specific areas by using monitoring and comparative analyses.³ Those states and regions showing the most success in certain areas are found through quantitative and to a far lesser extent qualitative analyses. Through naming and shaming, the Commission and the Council hope to bring about ‘learning from these best practices’ and, thus, an improvement and convergence of national welfare standards and policies.

3.2.3 Testing Scharpf’s analyses

I return to Scharpf’s analyses of Europeanization in regard to the classification of open co-ordination, which he captures in the modes of joint decisions, mutual adjustment and/or intergovernmental negotiations. I raise only one, although not unimportant, objection to Scharpf’s classification as mode of joint decisions: it presupposes a legislative process. Open co-ordination, however, is merely a regulation of procedures, which are not legally binding (Héritier 2002). Therefore, the mode of joint decisions cannot be carried out.

The mode of mutual adjustment remains, which by definition excludes any interactions between Member States and any participation of the European level. These criteria do not apply to open co-ordination. Particularly policy-learning happens – if at all – during a ‘co-operative game’.

The mode of intergovernmental negotiations fits since open co-ordination can be understood as a specific form of co-ordination and negotiation between Member States. Nevertheless, at least the strong involvement of the Commission is not considered in the construction of the intergovernmental negotiations mode.

On balance: The method of open co-ordination is not clearly grasped by Scharpf’s modes of Europeanization. The question also remains why Scharpf excludes the mode of hierarchical direction since open co-ordination also includes elements of this mode of Europeanization. Especially the development of guidelines and the evaluation of NAPs is mainly carried out by supranational actors. However, it remains clear that open co-ordination is a form of Europeanization of social welfare politics.

³ However, the target value used as the normative guideline should always be questioned when identifying ‘best practices’.

3.3 Summary

To sum it up, Scharpf's analyses cannot stand up a closer view of the political processes in the area of minimum standards and open co-ordination (see table 1). Scharpf's application of his modes of Europeanization to social welfare politics do not clearly correspond with the trends of Europeanization in social welfare politics distinguishable in the process of European integration. At least, his modes of Europeanization leave space for interpretation as his vague formulation 'somewhere between' and his own 'interpretational move' in relation to the method of open co-ordination indicates.

Table 1: Modes of Europeanization in social welfare politics

	Minimum standards	Open co-ordination
Scharpf 2000	'joint decisions'	between 'intergovernmental negotiations' and 'mutual adjustment'
Scharpf 2002	'joint decisions'	between 'joint decisions' and 'mutual adjustment'
Results of test	decision-making: hierarchical direction implementation phase: not represented	between all four modes of Europeanization or not clearly represented

4. Clear modes of Europeanization in social welfare politics?

As has become clear, difficulties appear at the attempt to reconstruct Scharpf's analyses of Europeanization of social welfare politics. In my opinion, these difficulties can be explained by the fact that Scharpf's typology is based on modes which cannot be found in political reality in an unambiguously manner. Although this is the nature of typologies, the question remains open whether Scharpf offers us a new hint for the development of a theory of governing in the European multi-level system. What Scharpf provides, in my opinion, is assistance in structuring differing institutionalised decision-making processes in the European multi-level system. However, it must be emphasized that the list does not yet seem to be complete. Accordingly, research strategies could be, *not* to locate the types and modes of Europeanization he constructed, but rather to strengthen further differentiation and therefore test his, in this sense, helpful typology of Europeanization.

It remains, that trends of Europeanization in social welfare politics can be recognized in political reality. Up to now, the legislative impact could only be achieved at a very low grade in the area of minimum standards. The dominant method of welfare politics in the EU, open co-ordination, can neither be grasped from an institutional governing perspective, and therefore, nor from the perspective of Europeanization since it is about "soft law" and also, correspondingly, because the constructive participation of the procedures depends on the good will of Member States. Therefore, I doubt that our analyses of open co-ordination will advance through exclusively institutional approaches that focus on problem-solving capacities, as Scharpf suggests. Rather, I agree with de la Porte and Pochet (2002b) who see possibilities to research open co-ordination and its effects while preferring discourse and policy-learning theories within the analytical framework of policy sciences.

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